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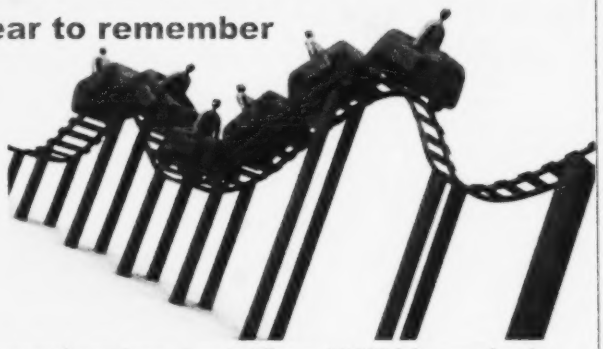
Labour Market News

CENTRAL ALBERTA

Alberta Employment and Immigration

2008 Year in Review

A roller coaster year to remember



There were plenty of attention grabbing headlines in 2008. A global recession came knocking at Canada's doorstep. Housing starts tumbled. Gas prices skyrocketed then plunged. Banks were faced with a credit crisis. Automakers looked for bailouts. Oil and gas drilling plummeted. Major oil sands projects were put on hold. Stock markets were battered and the Canadian dollar took a dive.

Central Alberta wasn't immune to the chaos, but the region still managed to avoid much of the fallout.

"I think we did fairly well considering the volatility and uncertainty that existed on a global scale," says Elin Ingolfsson, an economic development specialist with Red Deer Regional Economic Development. "I think we're in the best place that you can possibly be in the world right now. Alberta, in general, is well positioned for a global crisis because of the diversity that exists here."

Red Deer economist Mike Drotar says momentum from the past few years helped sustain the regional economy. The effects of the global recession weren't felt locally until the last few months of the year. "(Central Alberta) fared extremely well in 2008, given the situation. I do think that the real story is going to be in 2009," says Drotar, vice president of treasury for Servus Credit Union in Red Deer.

Cautious optimism

An informal survey done in fall by the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce found members were cautiously optimistic.

A total of 128 businesses replied—78 per cent said the global economic downtown was having zero to moderate impact. However, 22 per cent said the impact was significant. Some companies reported that business was up, while others said they were putting projects on hold.

Layoffs

For some companies, especially in the oil and gas and construction sectors, layoffs were in the cards. The Red Deer economic region's unemployment rate hovered around 3.5 per cent in the first quarter of 2008 and jumped to 4.8 per cent in December.

Towards the end of the year, traffic in local employment centres was up significantly, but the number of jobs being posted was down. Across Alberta, 16,000 jobs were lost in December, although the province's unemployment rate for the month was still the lowest in Canada at 4.1 per cent.

Positive outcomes

After several years of hectic growth, the slowdown had some positive effects. Companies who struggled with staffing shortages over the past few years found some relief, as workers stayed in their jobs longer and more people were looking for employment.

"2008 was a blessing in disguise in a way, just because it was a return to normalization. There was no more critical labour shortage," says Ingolfsson.

With business slowing, many companies also had more time to plan for the future. "People are able to … look into the longer range scope of planning, rather than just focusing on the day-to-day activities," she says.

Drotar agrees the slowdown was healthy for the region. "The pace that it was going before was actually very, very difficult for businesses to manage. In 2008, I would describe it as getting back to something more normal. (In 2009) we'll probably go into something that's going to be a little more painful."

Industry analysis

This third-annual Year in Review will examine major economic and labour trends in Central Alberta in 2008. The following industries will be reviewed: Oil and gas, agriculture, construction, retail, forestry, manufacturing, tourism, accommodation and food services, health care, transportation and warehousing and education.

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NEXT ISSUE...
Careers in office administration

YEAR IN REVIEW

oil & gas

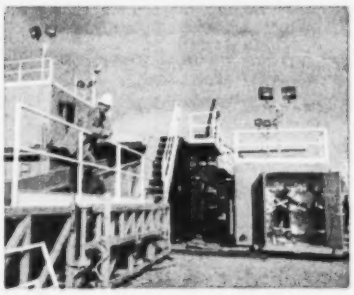
Alberta's oil and gas industry had a rough ride in 2008. A drilling slump that began in 2007 continued in 2008. The Petroleum Services Association of Canada (PSAC) estimates 11,815 wells were drilled in Alberta in 2008, a 15 per cent decrease from 2007.

Oil and gas companies blamed soft natural gas prices, market uncertainty and regulatory changes for the reduced activity. Several major oil and gas companies cut exploration budgets and announced project delays.

Central Alberta, a hub for oil and gas drilling and servicing, felt the effects. There were consolidations, office closures, restructuring and layoffs. But it wasn't all bad news—many companies were still investing in the region, building new facilities and expanding services.

Other highlights for 2008:

• In March, an $11.3 million deal saw Red Deer-based ***Central Alberta Well Services*** buy Wellco Energy Services Partnership's service rig division in Brooks.



• ***Leader Energy Services***, a major well stimulation and cementing services company, closed shop on its Red Deer operations in March. In fall, ***Quinn's Oilfield Supply*** purchased the property, which includes a 30,000-square-foot shop.

• ***Predator Drilling Inc***. opened shop in Red Deer in June after a group of investors raised $15 million in capital to build five rigs. The rigs will be used in Fort McMurray for shallow gas, coal-bed methane and oil sands drilling.

• ***Packers Plus Energy Services*** started building a new 29,700 square foot shop in Red Deer County's Clearview Industrial Park. The company manufactures multi-stage horizontal fracturing tools and provides fracturing services to the oil and gas industry.

• Plans were announced for a carbon dioxide (CO_2) transmission system through Central Alberta. The project, proposed by Calgary-based ***Enhance Energy***, would see CO_2 from industrial facilities in Alberta's Industrial Heartland pumped south on a 240-kilometre pipeline to a facility near Clive, located 30 minutes northeast of Red Deer. The CO_2 would be used for enhanced oil recovery projects in Central Alberta. The cost will be an estimated $300 million, if approved.

• ***Precision Well Servicing*** moved into a new $16 million, 48,000-square-foot facility in Red Deer County. It includes a nine bay shop, offices and training space. Local staff grew from 10 to 53.

• Red Deer-based ***High Arctic Energy Services*** was forced to sell two drilling rigs in summer to keep creditors at bay. Company shares dropped 84 per cent in 2008. The company is restructuring and announced in spring it was $126 million in debt.

agriculture

For Central Alberta crop producers and livestock farmers, 2008 was a year of ups and downs. Record grain prices caused by a global shortage had farmers smiling early in the year. By fall, though, the slumping world economy and strong crop yields around the globe caused those prices to plunge.

In Red Deer, for example, the average country elevator buying prices for canola hit $707.90 per tonne in March, dropping to $327.80 per tonne in December.

For farmers who pre-sold their crops in the spring, it was a good year. "Those farmers were able to capture some pretty good prices. But since the new crop has been harvested, prices have been under some pressure," says provincial crop analyst Charlie Pearson.

For many farmers, fluctuating fuel, fertilizer and feed costs and sliding

livestock prices continued to be a challenge in 2008. Still, according to Statistics Canada, farm cash receipts in Alberta were up 18.4 per cent in the first three quarters of 2008, to $7.7 billion.

Other highlights for 2008:

• Eighty-four farmers took part in Canadian Agricultural Skills Services, a program that funds skills training.

•In June, ***Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development*** announced $300 million in disaster funding to assist the livestock industry, which has been hit hard by several factors, including low livestock prices, high inputs costs and restricted access to foreign markets. The province also unveiled its ***Alberta Livestock and Meat Strategy***, a long-term strategy to stabilize and strengthen the industry.

• Farmers in Central Alberta braced to battle clubroot, a fungal disease that can reduce canola yields by 50 to 80 per cent, after an infection was found in Wetaskiwin.

• ***Agri-Trade*** at Westerner Park celebrated its 25th anniversary. The agricultural exhibition attracted 74,000 people over four days and had 520 booths.

• Plans were announced for a new $8.5 million ***Ponoka Ag-Event Centre***. The facility would include an indoor arena with seating for 1,500, community rooms, three barns, 50 camping sites and stock pens. It is a joint project of the Ponoka Agricultural Society, Ponoka Stampede Association, Ponoka County and the Town of Ponoka.

YEAR IN REVIEW

construction

After several years of record growth, the pace of development was more restrained in 2008.

Building permit numbers fell in most communities. Red Deer saw permits values fall from $421 million in 2007 to $254.8 million in 2008. Many smaller communities were also affected—Innisfail, for example, went from $48.4 million in permits in 2007 to $9.4 million in 2008 (see the January 2009 edition of In the News for detailed regional statistics).

The biggest drop in most communities was in residential construction. Some companies, especially home builders, welcomed the slowdown. "We've been running at capacity for the last few years, which created problems with labour shortages and getting materials," notes Scott Boyd, executive director of Canadian Home Builders' Association's Central Alberta branch.

Downsizing

For some companies, layoffs were in the cards. "We look at it as a balancing or normalization. A lot of builders had really staffed up in 2005 and 2006. They were able to carry that staff through to 2007 and then when things really started to correct in 2008, they were downsizing," says Boyd.

Despite the downturn, there were still plenty of construction projects underway or approved in 2008, including:

- A $6 million addition added two new floors to the ***Millennium Centre*** in downtown Red Deer and construction continued on ***Executive Place***, a $27 million, 12-story office tower.
- Construction began on new business and industrial parks around Olds, Lacombe, Blackfalds and Red Deer, with several companies moving to the region or relocating to larger facilities.
- A $30 million renovation and expansion started on the ***G.H. Dawe Community Centre*** in Red Deer.
- Construction was underway or planned for several multi-million dollar seniors facilities in Innisfail, Wetaskiwin, Red Deer and Olds.
- Work began on a new $30 million Red Deer ***RCMP*** station.
- Construction was underway in Red Deer in ***The Views at St. Joseph***, a $16.5 million condominium project.
- An assisted living condo project in west Red Deer was approved at an estimated cost of $23 million.

retail

Despite a recession and global economic turmoil, it appears consumers in Central Alberta remained relatively confident in 2008. While sales of big ticket items may have dropped, many shoppers in the region kept their wallets open.

Sales up at Bower Place

At Bower Place Shopping Centre, for example, sales from January to November were up 13 per cent over 2007. In November, heading into the busy Christmas season, sales were up six per cent from 2007 (figures from December were not available at press time).

"Our retailers did extremely well in 2008," says Roxanne Kirton, the mall's assistant general manager. The mall also recovered quickly when the Convergys call centre closed its doors at the end of June, putting 280 staff out of work. Eager retailers quickly leased space left vacant by the call centre. The mall began a $12 million renovation to accommodate 22 new stores, indicating that retailers remained confident in the Central Alberta market.

Across the region, several new retailers opened or were under construction in 2008. Highlights include:

- ***UFA*** in Red Deer doubled its size to 30,000 square feet. It is the company's largest farm and ranch supply store.
- ***Golf Town, The Brick, Urban Barn, Hakim Optical, Little Caesars Pizza*** and a dentist were among the tenants of a new development on Taylor Drive in Red Deer.
- ***Urban Planet*** and ***Labels*** opened in Red Deer's Parkland Mall, filling vacant space in the former Sears site.
- Ground work began on a new ***Canadian Tire*** store in Stettler. The ***Bargain Shop*** and ***Dollarama*** also opened their doors for business there.
- New ***Wal-Mart*** stores opened in Olds and Sylvan Lake and the Camrose store had an $8 million renovation.
- Ryders Square, a commercial complex in Sylvan Lake, had its official opening in September. Tenants include ***Sobeys, Shoppers Drug Mart*** and several smaller retailers.
- In Red Deer, a new ***Acura*** dealership opened, while ***Festival Ford*** dealership opened in Gasoline Alley.
- A $15 million shopping centre was under construction in Rocky Mountain House. There will be up to 20 tenants, with ***Shoppers Drug Mart*** the anchor.

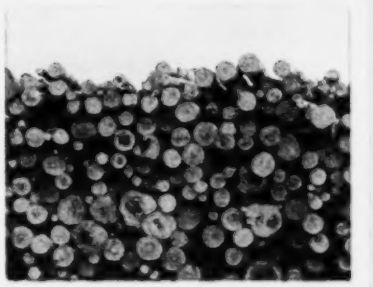
Not all retailers weathered the economic storm. ***SAAN*** stores across Canada were closed, including outlets in Rocky Mountain House, Innisfail, Stettler, Olds, Ponoka and Lacombe.

YEAR IN REVIEW

forestry

Forestry values continued their decline in 2008. In the first three quarters of the year, the value of Alberta forest products sent to market was down more than $264.9 million (almost 13 per cent) from the same period in 2007.

Lumber values were down $18.7 million, or nine per cent, and panelboard values took a $38.2 million dive, down 34 per cent. A bright spot was the value of pulp and paper products, which had a $46.4 million increase above 2007 levels. Falling profits over the past few years are the result of a slowdown in U.S. and Canadian housing starts, growing production costs and a high Canadian dollar.



While the dollar did start to slide in mid-2008, according to the Alberta Forest Products Association (AFPA), this provided only marginal benefits to forestry product exporters.

In September, the Alberta Government's Forest Industry Sustainability Committee released an interim report with 11 recommendations to improve the competitiveness of the province's forest industry. A final report was submitted to Sustainable Resource Development and is under review.

Lost jobs

The AFPA estimates 3,000 forestry jobs were lost in 2008 and the value of Alberta forest products has dropped more than one billion in the past 24 months. The Weyerhaeuser oriented strand board mill in Drayton Valley remained closed in 2008, after production was shut down in fall 2007.

Forestry is Alberta's third largest economic sector behind oil and gas and agriculture.

manufacturing

The manufacturing slowdown that began in 2007 continued into 2008. In particular, Central Alberta manufacturers were affected by reduced oil and gas activity and drop-off in residential housing starts.

"Some companies are hurting pretty badly, for example cabinet manufacturers that are tied into home building. They're down very significantly. Companies which fabricate heavy structures for the oil sands are down, too," says Mark Burggren, executive director of the Central Alberta Rural Manufacturers Association (CARMA). "I haven't heard of any closures but I have heard of layoffs, mainly in the welding trade."

In the second half of 2008, the falling Canadian dollar bolstered the export market, but only marginally.

Burggren believes local manufacturers are in a good position to weather the economic storm. Many companies are attempting to diversify so they're not reliant on one sector, such as oil and gas.

CARMA formed in July to enhance the local and global competitiveness of regional manufacturers. An estimated 240 manufacturers operate in the region, from small shops to major employers.

Other highlights for 2008:

• ***Evraz Camrose Works***, a pipe manufacturer, announced in December it

was laying off more than 90 of its 380 employees. The delay of a large pipeline project was a factor.

• ***Finning Canada*** purchased Collicutt Energy Services in Red Deer, switching from a gas compression manufacturing and service facility to one that customizes new Caterpillar equipment and overhauls used machinery.

• ***Keyera Facilities Income Fund*** began building a $26 million ethane extraction addition to its Rimbey plant.

• ***Option Industries Inc.***, a custom machining and welding company in Drayton Valley, opened a new 41,330-square foot facility.

• ***Cord WorleyParsons*** opened a new facility in the Blackfalds Industrial Park to fabricate modular structures for the oil sands. ***Wajax Industries***, a heavy equipment distributor, started building a sales, service and manufacturing facility in the same industrial park.

• ***Robco Cabinets*** started building a new manufacturing facility in the Gasoline Alley Business Park.

• Red Deer's ***McLevin Industries*** announced plans to build Canada's first LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified fabrication facility near Blackfalds. Construction has been put on hold until the economy strengthens.

• ***Hi-Tech Canada Development*** unveiled plans for a 106,000 square foot building panel manufacturing plant in Ponoka.

• Drayton Valley received $4.5 million in provincial funding for a fibre mat development, production and testing plant. The town will pay ***Tekle Technical Services*** to set up the bio facility.

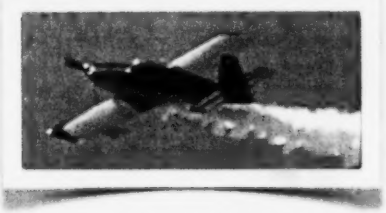
• Plans moved forward on a $70 million gasification plant that will turn garbage into electricity. Sylvan Lake, Red Deer and Red Deer County have signed on to the ***Plasco Energy*** project.

• Construction of a $400 million biofuel and canola crushing plant north of Innisfail was stalled by the regulatory process, but ***Alberta Ethanol and Biodiesel LP*** was still moving ahead with the project.

• ***Greenlab Energy Canada*** continued negotiating with Stettler County on the development of a $190 million biofuel plant north of Stettler.

YEAR IN REVIEW

tourism, accommodation & food services



Good weather, strong marketing campaigns and high gas prices all helped boost tourism in the region. Tourism Red Deer reports a record 74,637 travelers stopped by the visitor information centre in 2008, up from 68,714 in 2007. "It was just a real positive year all around," says executive director Darren Kuz.

Several major events also set attendance records. In Red Deer, a record 90,757 people attended Westerner Days in July. In August, the Rocky Airshow had a record-breaking 9,000 spectators, about 2,000 more than the last show in 2006. "I think high gas prices played a postive a role in keeping people closer to home," says Kuz.

Nine municipalities (Innisfail, Lacombe, Ponoka, Red Deer County, Rocky Mountain House, Stettler, Sylvan Lake, Red Deer and Wetaskiwin) joined forces to form the Central Alberta Tourism Committee. The committee launched a new marketing campaign and website to promote local events. The campaign was so successful it was extended to market winter activities.

"We thought we'd work as a team and promote (events) to the larger centres of Calgary and Edmonton," says committee chair Dean Schweder. "We did see an increase in traffic. The campgrounds were very busy in our area, and the hotel and accommodation sector had a good year as well."

Other highlights for 2008:

• Work began on the ***Gateway Project***, a 20-year, $3 million plan to transform Red Deer's Westerner Park into a major centre for sports, entertainment, trade shows, meetings and conferences.

• Talks continued on the ***Riverwalk*** project, an ambitious plan to boost culture and tourism in Red Deer. A scenic canal system, with a mix of commercial and high density residential development, was proposed.

• Several new hotels opened or received municipal approval in cities and towns across the region.

• ***Temple Real Estate Investment Trust*** purchased the Capri Centre hotel in Red Deer for $40 million and is planning an $8 million renovation.

• ***Central Alberta Raceways*** in Rimbey received a grant to help pave its quarter mile drag strip. The raceway attracts more than 15,000 racers and spectators each year.

• Negotiations continued on ***Alberta Downs***, a proposed horse racing race track and entertainment centre in Lacombe County.

health care

The past year was one of change for the health care system in Alberta. In May, Alberta Health and Wellness replaced the province's nine regional health boards with the Alberta Health Services Board. This single, centralized board will be responsible for health services delivery for the entire province.

Restructuring efforts progressed throughout 2008. Health care delivery continued as usual at the David Thompson Health Region (DTHR), which serves 300,000 people in the central region. However, there were changes happening behind the scenes.

"We began transitioning to one provincial authority fairly rapidly," says Elaine McFadden, DTHR's vice president of corporate communications. The official change-over will occur April 1, 2009.

Also in 2008, staffing shortages continued to be a challenge for DTHR. The health region employs about 10,000 people in 54 facilities. "We have done some overseas recruiting and had some success there, but we're still short on registered nurses, registered psychiatric nurses and licensed practical nurses. In rural areas, we still have physician shortages," says McFadden.

In summer, staffing shortages forced DTHR to temporarily close beds in some local hospitals. At the time, there were 300 job vacancies, including 200 for health care aides, licenced practical nurses and registered nurses.

Economic uncertainty in 2008 helped somewhat with retention. "People have been more reluctant to change jobs or move out of their current positions," says McFadden.

Other highlights for 2008:

• ***Johnstone Crossing Community Health Centre*** opened March 1. The $9.7 million facility offers various public health services. The opening helped relieve overcrowding at the ***Bremner Avenue Community Health Centre***, which is undergoing renovations.

• A new $21 million, 22-bed ***Rimbey Hospital*** opened in October.

• DTHR opened its newly renovated $12.7 million administrative headquarters in November in the historic Michener Hill building. It houses 180 support services staff.

• Groundwork began on ***Michener Hill Village***, a $65 million continuing care facility in Red Deer.

• $50 million in provincial funding was announced for the ***Central Alberta Cancer Centre***, for a regional radiation treatment facility.

• The $40 million ***Skyway Professional Centre*** was approved for a site north of the Red Deer Regional Hospital. The $40 million facility is expected to house the Central Alberta Hip and Knee Clinic, a cast clinic and six orthopedic surgeons, who are helping develop the centre.

YEAR IN REVIEW

transportation & warehousing

Soaring fuel prices and a shortage of diesel were some of the challenges facing transportation companies in 2008. In spring and summer, the price of gas and diesel fuel skyrocketed, forcing many companies to pass on the cost to their customers.

"We had a fuel surcharge in place to try and recover the cost. The problem was that the fuel prices kept escalating," notes Dean Kohut, co-owner of Hi-Way 9 Express Ltd., an inter-provincial carrier which operates several truck terminals across the central region.

Lower fuel prices towards the end of the year brought relief, but a diesel fuel shortage in the fall threatened to disrupt trucking operations across the province.

Truck drivers have been in high demand across Alberta, but the shortage eased towards the end of 2008. "Six months ago we were still struggling to try and find drivers. Today, we've got resumes piling up by the dozens," says Kohut. While some truck drivers are out of work, Hi-Way 9 has been able to hang on to its 250 drivers.

Other highlights for 2008:

• ***Red Deer College*** added an eight-week, Class 1 driver training certificate program to its calendar. It's the first program of its kind in Canada, offering a shortened practicum and improved access to student financing. The program runs in partnership with private truck driver schools in Red Deer, Calgary, Edmonton and Lethbridge.

• Construction was underway on a new ***Flying J Travel Plaza*** on 67 Street in Red Deer. It will include a Shell service station, showers, a truckers' lounge, convenience store, RV sanitary dump and propane fueling area.

• ***Westward Parts Services*** added 30,000 square feet of warehouse space to the company's Red Deer facilities, at a cost of $2.8 million.

• ***Calmont Leasing*** opened a 12,750-square-foot facility in Burnt Lake Industrial Park near Red Deer. The company rents, leases, sells and services trucks of all makes and sizes.

education

Central Alberta's growing population has created an increased demand for new and improved schools and programs. In 2008, several school districts and post-secondary schools were busy with expansion, renovation and new construction projects to meet the need.

Red Deer College

Work continued on Phase 1 of the Building Communities Through Learning expansion project. "2008 was a massive construction year," says Michael Donlevy, associate vice president of community relations.

The Centre for Trades and Technology welcomed its first students in September. Towards the end of December, the Centre for Innovation and Manufacturing and the Centre for Corporate Training were preparing to open their doors. Construction of the main floor learning commons also wrapped up at the end of December.

Still under construction is the Centre for Visual Art, expected to open in April 2009. Also in 2008, the college requested funding for Phase 2 of the project, which will include the Centre for Regional Sport and Wellness and the Centre for Health Education. "The total project will be in excess of $200 million," says Donlevy.

Olds College

In April, Olds College celebrated the opening of the Bell eLearning Centre, a high-tech hub for electronic learning. The centre has video conferencing and video editing suites and geospatial technology labs. It is one part of a $58 million Community Learning Campus (CLC) project being undertaken by the college and Chinook's Edge School Division. Also part of the project is a new fine arts and multi-media facility, scheduled to open in February 2009. Chinook's new Grade 9 to 12 high school and an adjacent health and wellness facility are under construction and expected to open in 2010.

Construction also started in fall on a new $9.5 million Equine Centre of Excellence. A $2.3 million expansion of the landscape pavilion was also underway in 2008.

Augustana Campus

In January, a $3.5 million provincial grant was announced to help pay for a new performing arts centre at the University of Alberta's Augustana Campus in Camrose. Construction continued on a new $13.2 million library, and work began on a $16.8 million gathering space, called the Augustana Forum.

Other highlights for 2008:

• ***Red Deer College*** and ***Olds College*** boosted their marketing efforts to attract new students.

• ***Canadian University College*** in Lacombe began offering its own bachelor of education degrees.

• Red Deer Public Schools finalized plans for a $6.6 million modernization of to ***G.H. Dawe Elementary School*** and a $2 million upgrade at ***Aspen Heights Elementary School***.

• Work began on the new $14 million ***H.W. Pickup Junior High School*** in Drayton Valley. Plans moved forward for a $12.25 million modernization of ***William E. Hay High School*** in Stettler.

• A $6 million modernization of ***St. Thomas Aquinas School*** started in Red Deer. Red Deer Catholic division also received extra funding from the provincial government to build ***Holy Trinity***, a new starter school in Olds, at a total cost of approximately $6.7 million.

Labour Force Survey Highlights

Looking back: 2008

After the labour shortages of the past few years, the demand for workers eased slightly in 2008, with a return to a more balanced labour market. The labour force (people working or actively looking for work) grew by 3,600 people, compared to a growth of 12,700 people in 2007.

The employment rate dropped 0.4 per cent, from 73.1 per cent in 2007 to 72.7 per cent in 2008.

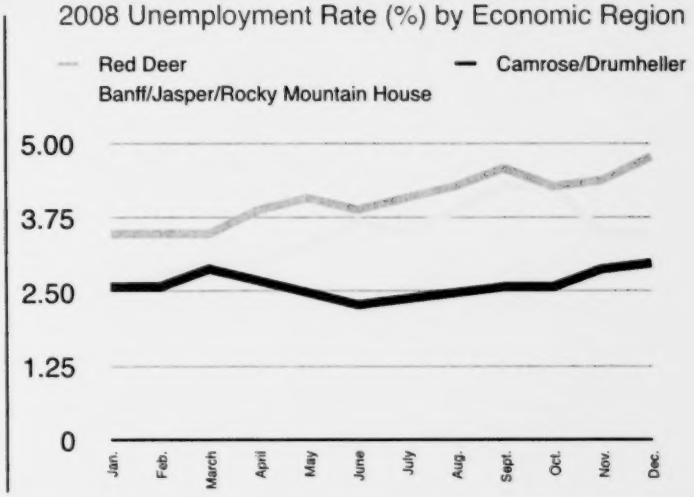
Unemployment rate

While Central Alberta's economy slowed towards the end of 2008, the year started off strong.

The Red Deer economic region's unemployment rate was 3.5 per cent for the first three months of the year, rising to 4.8 per cent in December. In Camrose/Drumheller region, unemployment went from a low of 2.3 per cent in July to three per cent in December. In the Banff/Jasper/Rocky Mountain House region, unemployment was at a low of 2.5 per cent in January, up to 4.3 per cent in September and October, then dropped to 3.5 per cent in December.

Central Alberta's average unemployment rate overall for 2008 was 3.3 per cent, compared to the Alberta average of 3.5 per cent.

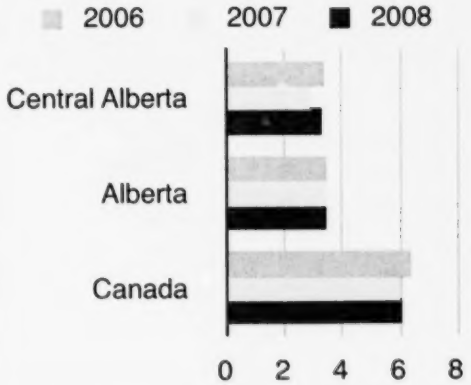
Economists generally agree that a balanced labour market has an unemployment rate of around five per cent (see graphic below right).



Region	Statistic (1,000's or per cent)	2007	2008	Annual Change
Combined data for the Economic Regions of : **Red Deer** (850) **Camrose Drumheller** (820) **Banff Jasper Rocky Mountain House** (840)*	Employment Rate	73.1%	72.7%	-0.4%
	Working Age Pop'n	364.0	369.7	5.7
	Not in Labour Force	89.5	91.8	2.3
	Labour Force	274.4	278.0	3.6
	Employment	266.1	268.7	2.6
	Unemployment	8.4	9.3	0.9
	Unemployment Rate	3.1%	3.3%	0.2%
Alberta	Unemployment Rate	3.5%	3.5%	0.0%
Canada	Unemployment Rate	6.0%	6.1%	0.1%

12-month average January 2008 to December 2008
All data are unadjusted three-month averages.
For definitions of statistics, please see the January 2006 Labour Market News, or Statistics Canada.
*Unemployment figures for Banff-Jasper-Rocky Mountain House were calculated when suppressed.
Source: Statistics Canada Cansim Table 282-2054

Unemployment rates (%)



Labour Market Thermometer

EMPLOYER Resources

Both federal and provincial governments have practical programs to help meet the current need for workers in this tight labour market. Here are a few programs that can be of assistance to business.

Information sources

The Labour Market Information page on the Alberta Employment and Immigration (E&I) website offers links to labour force statistics, forecasts, and wage and salary information. (employment.alberta.ca/lmi)

- **The Central Alberta Economic Partnership (CAEP) website (www.centralalberta.ab.ca) has hundreds of links to information sources, and programs, including:**
- Support for Training Workers
- Wage Subsidy Programs
- Recruiting Employees
- Employment Services in Central Alberta
- Foreign Worker Employer Guide

Seminars and networking

Employer Connections are held every Wednesday at the Labour Market Information Centre, 2nd Floor, First Red Deer Place, 4911-51 St. (across from the Provincial Building).

The meetings are an opportunity to meet job seekers, employment agencies and career counsellors.

Each week a single employer is showcased and presents their perspective.

To participate free of charge call (403) 340-4347 and ask for a Business and Industry Liaison.

Labour solutions

- **Red Deer Aboriginal Employment Services. Ph. (403) 358-7734**
- Career Assistance Network **teams unemployed workers with employers. Ph. (403) 341-7811**
- Employment Placement Support Services **supports adults over 25, and persons with disabilities age 18 and over. Ph. (403) 343-6249**
- **Employment Access offers employment programs for clients with disabilities. Ph. (403) 341-2363**
- DRES **provides support and assistance to employers hiring people with disabilities. Contact the Canada-Alberta Service Centre in Red Deer. Ph. (403) 340-5353**

Personalized help when needed

There are dozens of programs available to employers. E&I employees will visit the workplace and provide a summary of options and opportunities.

For example, they can direct managers to initiatives that will help their business.

For more information call (403) 340-4347 and ask for a Business and Industry Liaison.

Sign up free: We're live and online

This publication, In the News, (an electronic digest about regional business expansions, relocations and closures) and Finding Work In, which profiles different career opportunities, are available online at employment.alberta.ca/central.

A free subscription service will notify you by e-mail when the latest edition of each product comes out.

On the same web page there are Labour Market News products for Stettler, Wetaskiwin, Vermillion and Wainwright.

Best Practice highlights from 2008

Throughout 2008, employers across the Central Region shared their best tips and advice on initiatives and activities they've undertaken to improve attraction and retention in the workplace.

With the economy slowing, many employers may now have the time and opportunity to look at implementing new strategies to improve their own workplace environments. Below are highlights from our 2008 Best Practice stories. Complete stories can be found online at employment.alberta.ca/central.

- ***February-Staff Training***: Ongoing *staff training* helps with retention and helps employees advance at Tony Roma's restaurant in Red Deer.
- ***March-Defining Success***: At the non-profit Canadian Paraplegic Association, *defining success* isn't about profits, it's about how many people they can help. This model can also be used by for-profit companies to improve employee satisfaction.
- ***April-Women in Trades***: Red Deer's Goldec Hamm has tapped into an untaped labour pool by hiring *women in trades.*
- ***May-Employee Benefit Plans***: For Milk Movers, an Innisfail-area milk hauling company, providing an *employee benefit plan* helps give staff—and the company—peace of mind. It also helped attract and retain truck drivers at a time when recruitment was difficult.
- ***July-Integrating Immigrants into the Workplace***: To help with labour shortages, Sunterra Meats has brought in more than 100 temporary foreign workers at its Innisfail and Trochu plants. To *integrate immigrants into the workplace*, newcomers are provided an orientation, English training and are welcomed to community events.
- ***August-Hiring People with Disabilities***: Sobey's in Red Deer employs AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) recipients and the results have been positive.
- ***September-Performance Reviews***: Red Deer College's Performance Enhancement Program helps employees get constructive feedback and develop career goals.
- ***October-Mental Health in the Workplace***: Asset Builders Corp. believes in keeping employees safe both physically and mentally.
- ***November-Workplace Drug Testing***: Implementing a workplace drug testing policy has helped GasFrac Energy Services keep staff healthy and safe.
- ***December-Exit Interviews***: The City of Red Deer gains valuable feedback from existing employees to help with future recruitment and retention efforts.

JOB SEEKER Resources

There are many resources in the central region that can be helpful to job seekers and workers alike.

Where to find us

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Job search and career websites

- www.jobbank.gc.ca **(Job listings, links and other services)**
- www.alis.gov.ab.ca **(Alberta Learning Information Service)**
- www.workopolis.ca **(Job listings)**
- www.monster.ca **(Job listings)**
- www.nextsteps.org **(Job resources for youth)**
- www.albertajobs.com **(Job listings)**
- www.hgcareers.com **(Job listings)**
- www.healthjobs.ab.ca **(Health care job listings)**

Job search and career information by phone

Alberta Career Information Hotline:

1-800-661-3753

Fax: (780) 422-0372 TDD: (780) 422-5283

Resumé review service

The Government of Alberta e-Resumé Review Service is a great way to have a resumé reviewed and improved, before sending it to employers.

To access the service, log on to www.alis.gov.ab.ca/hotline/resume and follow the instructions to send your resumé for review.

The service is free to residents of Alberta and those seeking work in Alberta.

Resources for labour market information

These websites offer a wealth of labour market information on Alberta and specific communities.

- employment.alberta.ca/lmi **(Alberta Employment and Immigration)**
- www.alis.gov.ab.ca **(Alberta Learning Information Service)**
- www.albertafirst.com **(Business and economic information)**
- www.centralalberta.ab.ca **(Central Alberta Economic Partnership)**
- www.alis.gov.ab.ca/employment/lmi/alberta.asp) **(Labour market information across Alberta)**
- www.labourmarketinformation.ca **(Service Canada)**

Seminars and networking

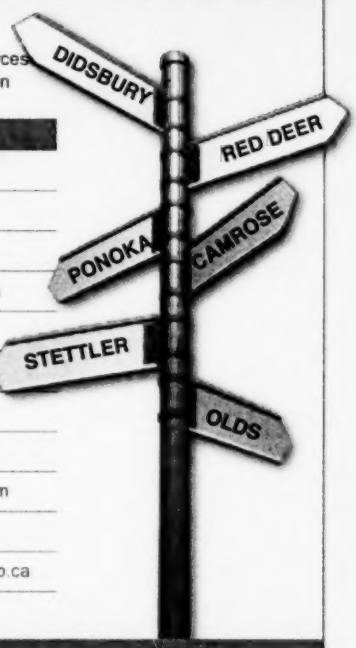
Employer Connections are held every Wednesday at the Labour Market Information Centre, 2nd Floor, First Red Deer Place, 4911-51 St. across from the Provincial Building.

The meetings are an opportunity to meet employers face to face.

New to Central Alberta?

See past issues of the Labour Market News (employment.alberta.ca/central) for employment, social services, health care, transportation and other great resources available in your community. Information is also available on municipal websites (see links below).

City / Town	Month
Camrose	www.camrose.com
Didsbury	www.didsbury.ca
Drayton Valley	www.draytonvalley.ca
Innisfail	www.townofinnisfail.com
Lacombe	www.lacombe.ca
Olds	www.town.olds.ab.ca
Ponoka	www.ponoka.org
Red Deer	www.city.red-deer.ab.ca
Rocky Mountain House	www.rockymtnhouse.com
Stettler	www.stettler.net
Sylvan Lake	www.town.sylvan-lake.ab.ca
Wetaskiwin	www.wetaskiwin.ca



LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION CENTRES

Labour Market Information Centres (LMIC's) provide information to help you make career, learning and work decisions. LMICs have books, magazines, newspapers, software and videos about employment-related topics.

There are LMIC's across Alberta. For a complete list, see: employment.alberta.ca/lmic.

LMIC's in Central Alberta:

Camrose Alberta Service Centre
3rd Flr., Gemini Centre, 6708 - 48 Ave.
Ph. (780) 608-2525

Drayton Valley Sub-Office
2nd Floor Provincial Building
5136 - 51 Ave. Ph. (780) 542-3134

Olds Alberta Service Centre
4905 - 50 Ave. Ph. (403) 507-8060

Red Deer Canada-Alberta Service Centre
2nd Floor First Red Deer Place, 4911 - 51 St.
Ph. (403) 340-5353

Rocky Mountain House Alberta Service Centre, 4919 - 51 St. Ph. (403) 845-8590

Stettler Alberta Service Centre
4835 - 50 St. Ph. (403) 742-7586

Wetaskiwin Alberta Service Centre
1st Floor Macadil Building
5201 - 51 Ave. Ph. (780) 361 1272

Lloydminster LMIC
5016 - 48 St. Ph. (780) 871-6445

Wainwright LMIC
810 - 14 Ave. Ph. (780) 842-7500

Vermilion LMIC
4701 - 52 St. Ph. (780) 853-8164